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ABSTRACT

Suggestions are offered for establishing local parent association groups as advocates for gifted and talented students. Beginning concerns include location and recruitment of new members; affiliation with state and national groups (such as the Association for the Gifted within the Council for Exceptional Children and the National Assocation for Gifted Children); decisions about group names, meetings, and dues; and the role of a newsletter. Suggestions are offered, including ensuring that the association's objectives are claear and that its structure conforms to those objectives. Activities of a parent group can feature such efforts as ongoing visits to the school system, community surveys, contact with the state consultant for the gifted and talented, and contact with legislators. (CL)

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1985
DIGEST

FORMING A LOCAL PARENT ASSOCIATION FOR GIFTED AND TALENTED EDUCATION

Advocacy for the gifted begins in the family—successful advocacy is an extension of good parenting. The positive qualities of home relationships determine the family's potential community effectiveness. A well-planned, structured parent network will be helpful in obtaining appropriate educational opportunities for gifted and talented students. Bylaws, officers, goals, and objectives will give credibility, visibility, and longevity. Each of the books in the Resource list has sample bylaws and other organizational aids.

How Should I Go about Establishing and Developing a Parent Group?

- *Membership.* Parent groups can begin with just a few concerned parents and educators. New members can be located and recruited through advertisements in PTA newsletters, community association newsletters, the local newspapers, and by word of mouth. From among initial respondents, a steering committee can be set up and task forces assigned to deal with specific concerns.
- *Affiliation with a state level group.* Many statewide groups have community chapters, enabling local members to participate in a larger advocacy network. The community group can also receive valuable support during its organizational stage with technical assistance available at the state level.

Affiliating with national associations will add strength at all levels:

The Association for the Gifted (TAG)
The Council for Exceptional Children
1920 Association Drive
Reston, VA 22091 (703) 620-3660

The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC)
Joyce Juntune, Executive Director
5100 N. Edgewood Dr.
St. Paul, MN 55112

- *Group Name.* Choose a name which accurately describes your purposes so that you can be easily identified by prospective members.
- *Meetings.* State associations frequently offer special interest workshops and programs in various locations throughout the state. A team of representatives from your local group may want to attend and report back to your group. Consider developing a speaker's program based on an "interest inventory" of the membership. Topics might include: parenting the gifted and talented, characteristics of the gifted and talented, state and federal legislation, reports from other programs in the state, and summer programs. Meetings can also be scheduled around advocacy activities, field trips with children, and social events.
- *Dues.* Dues should be sufficiently high to cover the operating expenses of the association, such as mailings, phone costs, speaker's programs, refreshments, and advocacy activities such as a trip to the state capitol to talk to legislators. However, try to keep dues as low as possible.
- *Newsletter.* If your state has a state association, it probably has a newsletter which keeps local chapters informed about state, local, and national events. Local chapters can submit news items, a calendar of events, and reports on programs. If no newsletter is available, start your own. It can become a vital communication link among members, schools, and the community. It may also attract new members.

As You Get Under Way, What Should You Be Concerned with First?

- *Make sure your objectives are clear.* Determine the primary purpose(s) of your group and be able to identify the advantages of belonging.
- *Make sure the group's structure conforms to its objectives.* There are many areas of interest and action for parent associations, each of which should have a separate task force. These task forces should concern themselves with: increasing the awareness of the needs of gifted and talented children in the home, school, and community; establishing weekend, parent-run enrichment programs outside the school system; developing a volunteer program to provide special classes within the schools; encouraging community agencies to offer opportunities and programs for gifted and talented students; supporting the efforts of the local school system; investigating special needs of gifted and talented students, such as development of the affective domain; and supporting legislation at state and federal levels.

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- *Keep accurate records.* Information on group activities, membership, a "skill roster," resources, and accomplishments has both present and future value.
- *Communication.* In addition to a newsletter, develop a telephone network both for routing organizational matters and for responding to urgent requests for legislative support.
- *Be ready to evaluate.* If your objectives are clear at the outset, you will better be able to assess the group's effectiveness and develop strategies for improvement.

What Kind of Agenda Should a Parent Group Have to Keep the Group Going?

- *Visit the school system.* Contact the superintendent of schools for an appointment to discuss programs and plans for the gifted and talented. Ask about their relative priority within the school district and the state. If programs are available, visit them and talk to principals and teachers. Become thoroughly familiar with school board procedures. Support and attend student concerts, recitals, plays, science fairs, and debates. This is grassroots advocacy. Be positive with the school. Give praise when it is deserved. If programs are not locally available, offer to cooperate in getting them started.
- *Survey the community.* The group can contact each school and PTA to determine the number and needs of gifted and talented students in the community. Investigate community resources, such as educational, cultural, and governmental units, to determine what services already exist and who can help with unmet needs. Explore the possibility of developing private sector resources to start or expand programs.
- *Establish linkages.* Parent groups in neighboring communities are often sources of valuable information on pitfalls to avoid, program suggestions, speakers, and moral support. Form coalitions and/or plan projects with community groups. Service clubs, the American Association of University Women, and the Junior League.
- *Contact the state consultant for the gifted and talented.* Each state department of education has a person assigned to the area of gifted and talented education. You can request information on legislation and funding, programs, other parent groups and their activities, agencies which provide services for the gifted and talented, and where to locate materials to distribute to your members.
- *Contact your legislators.* Become thoroughly familiar with your state's laws and the state education agency's policy on the education of the gifted and talented. When you contact your state senator or representative, be prepared to speak in *specific* terms about both legislation and policy. Coordinate your legislative positions so that you speak with one voice. Invite legislators to speak to your group and be prepared to contact them during each legislative session to offer support and express particular interests.

RESOURCES

An advocate's guide to building support for gifted and talented education. (1981). Edited by Patricia Bruce Mitchell. National Association of State Boards of Education, 444 North Capitol Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20001. Six chapters by six authors. 60 pp.

Gifted education: A parent packet of information. (1984). Compiled by Iowa Talented and Gifted, 3712 Cedar Heights Drive, Cedar Falls, IA 50613. 200 pp.

How to help your gifted child: A handbook for parents and teachers. (1977). By Gina Ginsberg and Charles H. Harrison. Monarch.

Promoting the education of the gifted/talented: Strategies for Advocacy. (1983). Edited by James J. Gallagher, Sandra N. Kaplan, and Irving S. Sato. National/State Leadership Training Institute for the Gifted and Talented, 316 West Second Street, Suite PH—C, Los Angeles, CA 90012. Nine chapters by nine authors.

Reaching out: Advocacy for the gifted and talented. (1980). By Abraham J. Tannenbaum. Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1234 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, NY 10027. A how-to booklet. 37 pp.

Somewhere to turn: Strategies for parents of the gifted and talented. (1980). By Eleanor G. Hall and Nancy Skinner. Teachers College Press, Columbia University. 60 pp.

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